

VZCZCXRO9128  
RR RUEHCI  
DE RUEHKA #2841 1380913  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 180913Z MAY 06  
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7884  
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9105  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1127  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7440  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8536  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

UNCLAS DHAKA 002841

SIPDIS

SIPDIS  
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION, MEDIA SHARPEN ATTACKS ON VOTER LIST

REF: DHAKA 2681

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Election Commission released its draft voter list on May 3, and gave the public until May 21 to submit corrections. The opposition Awami League and the media harshly criticize the list as having excess voters and numerous omissions. Prominent NGOs believe the problems are as much the result of sloppy execution as political manipulation. The AL insists the list is the result of "election engineering" and that if elections go forward with using this list, it will not participate. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Local media report significant anomalies in the new voter list, with "stranded Pakistanis," "Indians," and Rohingya refugees being included and Hindu communities and other AL supporters being excluded. In one prominent case, the AL MP from Mirzapur is not the list, which prompted a brief siege of the local election office. Another widely reported case is 15,000 registered voters listed as living in 17 villages long since destroyed by the Jamuna River. On May 9, Awami League (AL) president Sheikh Hasina accused the BDG of "election engineering," claiming in Parliament that 20 million "fake voters" had been added and that 700,000 AL supporters had been omitted. The AL says it will not participate in elections held under a new voter list. At the same time, AL organizing secretary Akhtaruzzaman told us the AL is still urging its grassroots network to check the lists and add missing supporters.

¶3. (SBU) Several NGO monitoring groups told us that problems with the voter list stem as much from sloppy execution by the Election Commission (EC) as overt political manipulation. They cited partisan and poorly trained registration workers as the main problems, and attribute many of the errors to a change in the remuneration system for enumerators which paid them by the area instead of per voter registered. The whole process, they stressed, was rushed, marked by numerous management errors, and poor oversight from the EC in Dhaka.

¶4. (SBU) The Appellate Court is expected to rule soon on the legality of the new voter list, or whether the EC should use the 2001 list as its starting point. If the Court rules against the EC and throws out the voter list, one NGO official speculated that controversial Chief Election Commissioner M.A. Aziz might resign.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The media and opposition are focusing on mostly anecdotal evidence to claim widespread political manipulation of the new voter list, but reality may be more nuanced. In the case of the phantom villages, some say the former residents are in fact alive and well in nearby areas. Once NDI and local NGOs complete their systematic reviews of the lists, we should have a firmer feel for whether the problems are widespread or intentional.

